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Optimism, indeed, asserts itself in the author's eloquent formulation of the thought which stands out so clearly amid the horrors of the struggle—the thought that humanity as a whole has revealed a greater capacity for self-sacrifice than any prophet would have dared to attribute to it. But there is one passage which does more to dampen one's spirits than the whole book does to cheer one: "Let there come a thousand years of civilization, a thousand years of peace, with all possible refinements of art and education, the sub-conscious element of the German spirit . . . will remain absolutely the same as today, and would declare itself, when the opportunity came, under the same aspect, with the same infamy." Undying hatred! Has a more pessimistic sentence ever been penned!

CREATIVE INVOLUTION. By Cora Lenore Williams. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1916.

"Individuals," writes Bergson in *Creative Evolution*, "join together in a society; but the society, as soon as formed, tends to melt the associated individuals into a new organism, so as to become itself an individual, able in its turn to be part and parcel of a new association. And it is this that we express when we say that unity and multiplicity are categories of inert matter, that the vital impetus is neither pure unity nor pure multiplicity, and that if the matter to which it communicates itself is to choose one of the two, its choice will never be definitive: it will leap from one to the other indefinitely. The evolution of life in the double direction of individuality and association has therefore nothing accidental about it: it is due to the very nature of life."

This "double direction" of evolution, this conflict or alternation between individuality and association, between the centrifugal and the centripetal tendency, between evolution and *involution*, has long been more or less fully recognized. But popular thought, as well as the thought of scientists and philosophers, has been chiefly influenced by evolution in the narrower sense—by the principles of differentiation and selection. So interesting and so impressive is the idea that social groups, when formed, are subject to the law of evolution, that one is prone to lose sight of the fact that the formation of the group is itself the exemplification of a tendency or "law." When both tendencies are reckoned into the problem, when the balance of thought is restored by stressing the involutionary process as it deserves, shall we not obtain a deeper insight into life and reality than we have hitherto possessed? Interesting answers to this question are suggested in the book *Creative Involution* by Cora Lenore Williams, the reading of which will prove a stimulating experience.

Miss Williams's book is luminous, if not altogether illuminating: it is one of the relatively bright spots in the general pitch darkness

of the metaphysical heavens. The nucleus of this constellation of ideas consists of two points of light—one a star possibly of the first magnitude, the other dimmer and more mysterious. The first and brighter of the two is the idea of involution as expounded by Bergson; the second and dimmer is the conception of the “fourth dimension.” Grouped around these two and held in place by a certain intellectual attraction are various thoughts which twinkle with a more familiar radiance.

Practically, in determining the significance of this system of Miss Williams’s—as of any other system—one must find answers to two questions. First, how does the new order of ideas affect one’s conception of conduct? Secondly, what new light, if any, does it shed upon the ultimate nature of reality!

As regards conduct, the original *simon-pure* evolution has never proved a satisfactory guide. It can explain after a fashion the genesis of ethical ideas; it can supply explanations of past phenomena and justifications of past deeds; it can even aid us in making forecasts in regard to human behavior. But it does not point out a way of life. It is in essence fatalistic. To speak of obeying the law of evolution in the sense in which we speak of obeying the moral law, is as absurd as to speak of obeying the law of gravitation—one obeys willy-nilly. Again, the logical outcome of evolution as applied to individuals is the Nietzschean superman—a monstrous and tormenting conception.

Does involution give us a broader and deeper foundation for ethics? A broader, perhaps, but not a deeper. Some middle term, some means of mediating between the two opposed tendencies must be found, if conduct is to be referred to both. For it is more difficult to co-operate with two tendencies than with one; and if judged by common moral standards the superman is bad, the superstate, it appears, may be worse.

The doctrine of involution, then, seems to leave moral values about as they were. This, in fact, Miss Williams herself practically admits when she declares her belief that the definite principle of life in social systems is the moral law. Thus involution is not itself a moral law: it is rather, in the author’s view, a semi-religious or philosophical principle—a means of justifying the ways of God to man.

Viewed in this light, the principle is suggestive. But there are two dangers which need to be avoided by the involutionist as well as by the evolutionist. The first is the danger of mistaking an observed law for its desired fulfilment; the second is that of erroneously identifying an observed tendency with a moral principle. Against neither of these errors has Miss Williams sufficiently guarded the expression of her ideas. No doubt she is right in regarding the present war as a necessary stage in the evolution, or *involution*, of human society; but when she writes that “because the time is

now ripe for the manifestation of these super-personal entities which we call nations is proof conclusive that the mission of the Galilean has been accomplished," one feels that the end has been momentarily confused with the means. And when she declares that "the one virtue left to us as individuals in view of the biological chasm yawning at our feet is loyalty—'our country, right or wrong'"—she seems to identify loyalty to a group or to a community with God.

It remains to inquire in what relation to all this stands the author's thought about the fourth dimension. The relation is none too clear. About all that can be said is that mathematical speculations upon this difficult and fascinating theme always tantalize one with half glimpses of possible modes of progress that seem to our space-bounded vision not to be progress at all, with possibilities of an actual order of things involving wider relations than any that we know. But it is never possible to be sure that these suggestions are anything more than mathematical imaginings, than figures of speech.

As might be expected the tentative attempt to build a metaphysic upon involution and the fourth dimension remains a tentative attempt—leaving the reader with bright suggestions of a new heaven and a new earth and with a detritus of more or less familiar ideas not wholly worked into the new system, but only gathered more or less closely around it. One wishes, then, that the author had given her book more definitely the form of a critique rather than that of a series of aphorisms and inspirations; that she had more plainly delimited her thesis and had taken more pains to "distinguish away" false or misleading interpretations of her leading ideas.

But the book is stimulating. A larger life—a life not bounded by death or desolation—involution and even the fourth dimension may be guiding stars leading toward that. Perhaps they are nearer the center of the system than poetry or art or other forms of thought which try to formulate what lies beyond our immediate grasp. Of so much the author may perhaps convince her readers.

FRENCH PERSPECTIVES. By ELIZABETH SHEPLEY SERGEANT. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916.

In these distracted days it is a relief to come upon a book about human nature—and particularly about human nature in one of the countries now at war—that is in tone and thought entirely undistracted; that reveals no doubt as to the reality and permanent value of good morals, good taste, good manners; that manifests faith in human intelligence and a delight (which this faith makes possible) in variations of individual or national character. Such a book is *French Perspectives*. It is not a war book; it is not a book that pretends to great wisdom in the matter of sociological observation or literary criticism. But it is a book in which personal impressions